

Guilds

During the 1100's CE, merchants, artists, bankers, and other professionals grouped themselves together in business associations or clubs called guilds.

Other examples of Guilds

Guilds

Carpenters
Shoemakers
Blacksmiths
Masons

Guilds

Bankers
Barbers
Tailors
Weavers

Purpose of the Guilds: The purpose of the guilds was to keep each member's territory exclusive. If you were a baker, your guild promised you a certain amount of space before another baker could build a shop. As well, if your shop burned down, the guild would care for you and your family. Guilds also arranged social occasions and festivals for its members.

Requirements for Guild Membership: In exchange, guilds had strict rules that you, as a guild member, had to follow. Rules included:

- **Price Control:** The guild decided on the price of each item. All bakers, for example, charged the same price for a loaf of bread, the price set by the guild.
- **Wage Control:** All workers had to be paid the same, so that the best workers could not be enticed away with better wages somewhere else.
- **Quality Control:** Everyone had to satisfy the quality standards set by their respective guild. No one was allowed to sell shoddy goods.
- **Advertising Control:** No guild member could advertise their wares. The guilds wanted people to think that all wares offered the same quality, no matter what shop sold them.

Other Guidelines

Guilds controlled all business and trade in the town.

Only members of the guild could buy, sell, or make goods there.

The guilds decided the prices.

If your goods were poorly made, or if you cheated in business you had to pay a fine.

They could be expelled from the guild.

The guild took care of its members.

Unemployed workers were given food.

Families of dead members were taken care of.

Guilds were the center of social life.

The Guild sponsored entertainment

Climbing the Ladder of Success: People could work their way up to positions of power, and ultimately own their own shop.

- **Masters:** At the top of the ladder were people who owned their own shops. Owners were called "masters".
- **Journeyman:** After he had learned something about his craft, a man could move up to the level of journeyman. A journeyman was paid a little money, along with free food and a place to sleep. He could only work under a master. To become a master, a journeyman had to submit a sample of his work - a "masterpiece" - to a committee of masters in his guild. If they approved his work, he could set up shop in a place assigned to him by the guild, and become a master himself.
- **Apprentice:** An apprentice was at the bottom of the ladder. During the period an apprentice was learning a skill, he received food, a place to sleep, and training, but he was not paid.

Taxes: The Guilds made sure that all shop owners paid taxes to the king. This kept the kings on their side. Soon, kings began to depend upon shop owners for many of their needs, including income from the taxes this new middle class paid the kingdom. Kings, and in some cases nobles, granted towns a charter that said they had the right to control their own business and affairs as long as they continued to pay taxes to whomever had granted the charter.

Teacher Guilds: As the towns grew, guild leaders realized there was a need for lawyers and courts. If they were going to rule themselves, they needed a system of rule. But almost no one knew how to read and write. To fix this, one of the towns created a "university", a school of higher learning. The university was not a single place. School was held in rented rooms and in courtyards. Books were scarce. But classes met on a regular schedule. Not just anyone could be a student. To study at university, you had to pass a test and be accepted.

By the end of the 1200's, teacher guilds (universities) had sprung up all over Europe. There were over a thousand students at any one time studying Roman Law, Latin classics, the teachings of Islamic scholars, and the philosophies of Aristotle. Students who attended the universities were *not* the sons of nobles. They were the sons of the new middle class. When literature and art were added to the curriculum, there was clearly a stirring, the beginning of the rebirth of culture. The success of the universities showed that things were changing, and changing rapidly.

